

## CHAPTER 17

### **Safeguarding the Protection Rights of Children in the Eastern Caribbean**

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#### **Introduction**

The Eastern Caribbean Area (ECA) is a relatively wealthy sub-region of four overseas territories and eight independent states where the positive development of many young children is hindered because they are disproportionately affected by experiences of violence, including child sexual abuse (CSA) (Meeks-Gardner, Henry-Lee, Chevannes, Thomas, Baker-Henningham, and Coore, 2007). This situation continues to prevail despite ECA island states' policy commitments and considerable social progress towards child protection, which means that ECA states are not meeting their commitments as signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations (UN), 1989), particularly in respect of Articles 19, 34, 37 and 39. This situation contributes to the global situation for which children's rights are not secured universally.

Violence against children (VAC) is considered both a violation of human rights and an international public health issue. CSA is regarded as a form of VAC (Wirtz, Alvarez, Guedes, Brumana, Modvar and Glass, 2016) that has been acknowledged as a social problem since the 1970s (Rock, 2013). Joseph (2013) notes that CSA in the Caribbean countries is not only a social issue, but also an issue that infiltrates health, education and economic domains. The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) (2006) define CSA as:

...the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Children can be sexually abused by both adults and other children who

are – by virtue of their age or stage of development – in a position of responsibility, trust or power over the victim. (p.10)

Infants and young children may be particularly vulnerable to CSA, since they tend to be physically smaller and less strong than adults and older children, and they are especially reliant on adults to provide for many of their care needs, child abuse is most often perpetrated by family members at home (United Nations General Assembly, 2006) and young children do not have contacts outside the home or the verbal lexicon that may enable them to tell others about their abuse.

In their study of CSA in the ECA, Jones and Trotman-Jemmott (2009, p.9) identified the following behaviours as CSA:

- ‘Rape
- “Consensual” sexual intercourse with a minor
- Incest
- Children used as sexual objects in videos, photos or as pimps
- Exposure to sexual material through different media, e.g. radio, photos, movies, text, mobile telephone, Internet, parent/adult sexual toys, sexual DVDs • Exposing the child to the sexual act deliberately or unknowingly
- Uncomfortable or intrusive touching of child’.

It is acknowledged that CSA requires ‘a consolidated response from several levels’ to be tackled effectively in Caribbean states (Howe, 2013; Joseph, 2013:4). As part of their rights-based work, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has recognised that a multi-level response is required to address the specific CSA challenges in ECA states (Howe, 2013: 50-52). In this chapter, we examine the prevalence of VAC, including CSA, in ECA states, we identify ways that UNICEF is attempting to address this in the sub-region and we discuss some of the challenges in respect of that work. We open the chapter with an overview of UNICEF’s global work since its inception. Discussion follows concerning the ECA island states and their issues of VAC, including CSA. We then chart ways that the UNICEF Eastern Caribbean Area Office (UNICEF ECA) collaborates with governments, non-governmental and civil society organisations across health, education and social development sectors to address the issue of

VAC, including CSA, as well as the prevention and responsive protection strategies implemented by the UNICEF ECA with its partners. We argue that the paramount challenges to the implementation of those strategies reside in the Eastern Caribbean states' recognition of the multidimensional nature of the issue of CSA as a form of VAC and their realisation of multifaceted, integrated solutions.

### **UNICEF's Work in the World**

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) that was first set up in 1946 by the United Nations General Assembly as the United Nations Children's International Emergency Fund to help countries emerging from World War II conflict to 'mend the lives of their children' (Black, 1986:16). An Executive Board is responsible for UNICEF's governance, it is funded by voluntary contributions and its 8000 employees work out of its headquarters, regional and field-based offices (MOPAN, 2016). UNICEF builds partnerships towards reifying 'the vision of peace and social progress enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations' (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2003). UNICEF '...works in 190 countries and territories to save children's lives, to defend their rights, and to help them fulfil their potential, from early childhood through adolescence' (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2019a). It identifies that it partners governments and NGOs to secure child survival, education, child protection and inclusion, providing supplies, logistics and support in emergencies, addressing gender inequalities, innovation, and research and analysis UNICEF (2019a). According to its mission statement, the United Nations General Assembly mandates that UNICEF '...advocate(s) for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential' (UNICEF, 2003). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) guides its work and UNICEF is committed to establishing children's rights internationally, alongside universal recognition that children's survival, protection and development underpin human progress. UNICEF is particularly committed to making sure disadvantaged children, including those who have experienced violence and exploitation, receive 'special protection'. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2019b) position statement is clear that the organisation 'has zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse'.

An assessment of UNICEF's work 2014-2016 by MOPAN (2016) found much to commend, citing its strengths as its focus on the future, organisational transparency, commitment to realising child rights and gender equality, governance, equity, and human rights, performance management, agility in operations, advocacy, fund raising, and communications. UNICEF also produces many of its own reports about its work, among which its Annual Results Reports identify many successes: the 2017 Annual Results Report highlights the organisation's achievements in 'health; HIV and AIDS; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); nutrition; education; child protection; social inclusion; humanitarian action; and gender' (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2018a).

However, UNICEF's work is not universally condoned. In a challenge to its reputation, for example, its industry partnership with the confectionary company Cadbury Adams Canada was criticised (Collier, 2010): in return for being allowed to display UNICEF's logo on its confectionary packaging, the company donated \$500,000 to UNICEF. Critics noted that this agreement had the potential to compromise UNICEF's nutrition programme (Collier, 2010). Furthermore, although MOPAN (2016) identified strengths in UNICEF's operation, as indicated above, it also reported several aspects of UNICEF's work requiring development. These areas for organisational improvement included results-based management and budgeting, clearer role differentiation, robust evaluative evidence on UNICEF programming, a more systematic approach to knowledge generation, use of country systems, and enhanced environmental sustainability. Equally, UNICEF is self-critical: in 2013, its Innovation Unit Co-Lead highlighted the value it places on identifying and critiquing its failures to leverage improvements for its future work Fabian (2013). Moreover, in 2018, McVeigh reported that UNICEF acknowledged its failure to support children in the Central African Republic who claimed they were victims of sexually abuse and rape by French peacekeepers.

### **Violence against Children in the Eastern Caribbean States**

In this section, we describe briefly the situation for children in the Eastern Caribbean area, before considering issues of violence against children (VAC), including child sexual abuse (CSA), that prevail in that sub-region.

### ***The Situation for Children in the Eastern Caribbean Area***

Children constitute about a third of the population in the 12 countries under UNICEF ECA multicountry Programme of Co-operation which comprises four overseas territories - Anguilla, Monserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands, and the Virgin Islands - and eight independent states - Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, the Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago. The ECA population is eclectic in terms of faith, culture and ethnicity (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2010); the ECA small island states, which are categorised as high- or upper-middle-income category, score well on the Human Development Index overall and have high levels of universal primary and secondary education (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2016). However, ECA island states are vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters, including tropical storms and hurricanes and their effects, which can be devastating for the population as a whole (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), 2016; UN News, 2018). Reduced public expenditure and unemployment that tend to follow natural disasters often impact negatively on children's lives (Meeks-Gardner et al., 2007). When Hurricanes Irma and Maria caused children and their families to lose their homes in 2017, social protection services were disrupted, the sanitation infrastructure was compromised and children's pre-school and school buildings were destroyed; children's needs for psychosocial and health support in the ECA increased at the very time services were lost (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2018b).

Economic growth has been comparatively low in the ECA since the 2008-2009 financial crisis (UNICEF, 2016). There is increasing inequality among the sub-region's population, with deprivation disproportionately affecting children, unequal access to social services, high unemployment among the young, and significant VAC, particularly in Trinidad and Tobago (Meeks-Gardner et al., 2007; UNICEF, 2016). Human Development Index scores in the subregion have declined in recent years (World Bank Group, 2018). Many fathers are absent from children's lives in ECA states, and children in the region whose fathers are absent tend to experience marginalisation (UNICEF, 2016; United Nations Children's Fund Office for the Eastern Caribbean Area (UNICEF ECA), 2017a; 2017b). Child health issues in the ECA include a relatively high incidence of nutritional deficiencies, disadvantaged children lost from the health

system (as well as education and protection systems) and childhood obesity linked to diseases later in life (UNESCO, 2010; UNICEF, 2016).

Equally, despite high levels of universal primary and secondary education in the ECA, educational outcomes are disproportionately low, with poor quality of education in schools and early childhood education (ECE) settings. Less than 20% of ECE provision is state maintained, with the rest run by the private and voluntary sectors (Harvard, 2017; UNICEF, 2016). Many disadvantaged young children do not access structured early childhood development (ECD) programmes in ECA states, with 10 to 20 per cent of children aged 3 to 5 years not attending preschool. Differences are prominent between the richest and the poorest households. In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, 93 per cent of children living in the richest households were estimated to be receiving ECD services, compared with 72 per cent of children from the poorest households (UNICEF ECA, 2017a). Limited data suggest that fewer than 50 % of the children under three years old are accessing structured ECD programmes and services of the The United Nations Children's Fund Office for the Eastern Caribbean Area (UNICEF ECA), 2017c), which is alert to potential problems that poor - or no - ECE provision may be storing up for the subregion's future:

Failure to invest in early childhood education (ECE) means that children in the 0–5 age group are robbed of their potential for optimal development in the physical, cognitive, linguistic and socio-emotional areas (p.49).

This position taken by UNICEF ECA (2017c) is based on robust scientific findings suggesting that experiences in the earliest years of life have the greatest effect on cognitive development, mental and physical health and lifetime outcomes (Shonkoff and Richter, 2013).

### ***Violence against Children in the Eastern Caribbean Area***

Inequality, unemployment, poverty, absent fathers and parental conflict are recognized as risk factors for neglect and VAC (UNICEF, 2016; Wilkinson, 2004). Physical, emotional and sexual VAC is a significant issue in education settings and homes in the ECA: up to 70 per cent of children told UNICEF that they had experienced either physical or emotional abuse in the previous month (UNICEF, 2016). VAC is identified as a legacy of the British Colonial history of some ECA states: neither childhood nor children were protected when children and adults

worked together as slaves on Caribbean plantations in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and the prevalence of physical punishment of children in ECA homes and schools is recognised as a legacy of British Colonialism in the sub-region (Burns, 2013; Meeks-Gardner *et al.*, 2007). Boduszek, Debowska, Trotman Jemmott, Da Breo, Willmott, Sherretts and Jones (2017) found that 52% of children from Barbados and 60% of children from Grenada said they had experienced verbal violence at home, while 30% of children from Barbados and 40% of children from Grenada said they had experienced physical violence at home. Bodusek *et al.* (2017) also found that boys from both countries were more likely than girls to accept - and engage in - violent behaviour. In their study of violence in the home in Caribbean countries, Sutton and Álvarez (2016) report that 66% of Caribbean respondents thought corporal punishment should be administered to children if they misbehave and, 91% of them said they had experienced physical punishment as children. UNICEF (2016) found that younger children and boys are most likely to be physically punished; Sutton and Álvarez (2016) also report that neglect of younger children is not uncommon in the ECA region. For example, in Barbados, 29% of reports of neglect concern children up to 36 months, while children younger than 9 years are involved in 69% of reports. Among a population of 1.3 million, the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (2015; 2016) identified 5,809 cases of child abuse in the year 2015-16, most of which were physical or sexual abuse, and they found children younger than 9 years engaged in illegal activities.

CSA occurs through threat, intimidation, manipulation and force (Collin-Vézina, Daigneault, & Hébert, 2013) and its victims present with trauma, disease, relationship problems and psychopathology (Reid, Reddock and Nickenig, 2014). Jones, Trotman Jemmott, Maharaj and Da Breo noted in 2014 that CSA and exploitation were common in the ECA, no comprehensive CSA data systems were in place and CSA incidents tended to be subject to secrecy. Howe (2013) identifies that securing reliable statistics on the extent of CSA is difficult. Nevertheless, UNICEF (2016) found that 40 per cent of women in ECA states said they had experienced sexual VAC, while trafficking of girls (and women) for sexual exploitation has been identified as a 'serious problem' in the ECA, with economic, social and racial inequality identified as the root cause (Jones *et al.*, 2014).

Based on data from a major mixed methods study conducted with 1400 participants from six ECA states, Jones and Trotman-Jemmott (2009: 9) identified CSA in the ECA as: ...an alarming picture of a social problem that is escalating, has increasingly severe consequences for Caribbean societies, has multiple layers and is perpetuated not only by adults who carry out harmful sexual practices with children but also by non-abusing adults through complicity, silence, denial and failure to take appropriate action.

The men (37.9%) and women (62.1%) who took part in Jones and Trotman-Jemmott's (2009) study were practitioners, clinicians and policymakers from various disciplines who work with CSA victims, as well as adults who had experienced CSA. Participants reported that CSA was more prevalent in family homes than elsewhere; they identified that most child sex abusers are men, but some women are also abusers and they thought most victims were girls, although some practitioners said they had recently noticed more boys becoming victims of CSA. Some participants reported the CSA of babies. 25% of respondents agreed that sex between adults and children is considered normal in some families, 22% agreed that sex between brothers and sisters is considered normal in some families, and more than 70% agreed that 'women sometimes turn a "blind eye" when their partners have sex with children in their families' (Jones and Trotman-Jemmott, 2009:238). Participants thought that a number of factors resulted in CSA in the home, including lack of parental supervision, single parent families, step fathers, multiple partners, complex family structures, mothers failing to protect their children, and secrecy. Although participants in Jones and Trotman-Jemmott's study identified home as the principle site for CSA in ECA island states, they also noted that CSA happens outside the home. 67% of participants agreed that adults children trust - including bus drivers, priests, teachers, and coaches - are more likely than strangers to engage in CSA. They also noted that others in positions of authority sometimes knew about incidences of CSA but did nothing. Transactional CSA between minors and adult men, for which money or other commodities are exchanged for sex was identified by participants as an increasing problem in the ECA.

In a review conducted by the UNICEF ECA concerning '*Sexual Violence against Children in the Caribbean*', Howe (2013) identified challenges and weaknesses in respect of prevention, response, and service delivery for children who have experienced CSA and their families. These included, but were not limited to:



- Insufficient services and allocation of resources
- Inadequate staff training
- Inadequate and variable service accessibility, coverage and response
- Inadequate provision for reporting and referral pathways
- Variable waiting times for initial assessment
- Insufficient focus on gender aspects of CSA prevention and treatment
- Inadequate data collection and use of data to inform service provision
- Inconsistent information sharing among agencies
- Weak or non-existent monitoring and evaluation
- Lack of child friendly procedures
- Fear and confusion concerning disclosure
- Insufficient programmes to prevent and raise awareness of CSA
- Silence, shame and stigma among children who have experienced CSA and their families
- Insufficient school, family and community-based resources and services
- Inadequate involvement of children in decisions affecting them.

Based on the report findings, Howe (2013) made fourteen recommendations for how CSA in the Eastern Caribbean area could be addressed.

### **How is UNICEF addressing Child Sexual Abuse in the Eastern Caribbean?**

The research findings set out in the previous section provide evidence that some children's rights (UN, 1989) are not respected by all in ECA island states. Specifically, children's UNCRC rights (UN, 1989) to be protected from all forms of violence (Article 19), to be protected by governments from sexual exploitation and abuse (Article 34) and cruel or harmful punishment (Article 37) have been ignored in many cases. As we indicated earlier in the chapter, this may be especially the case for younger children and infants: because of their relative lack of size and strength, their need to depend on adults, and their reliance on non-verbal communication, they are, as noted in UNCRC General Comment No.7, particularly vulnerable to 'poverty, discrimination, family breakdown and multiple other adversities that violate their rights and undermine their well-being' (United Nations (UN), UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005).

### ***Ideas on to tackle CSA in the ECA***

Rafferty (2013) recommends that measures to address violence internationally should include social protection, awareness raising, community involvement, provision of resources and funding to support gender equality, communication and collaboration. In respect of addressing CSA in the ECA, Howe (2013:50) proposes that:

A more determined and coordinated effort is... needed to prevent and respond to child sex abuse in the region. The obstacles facing child sexual abuse prevention and responses in the region are many but none are insurmountable. The paramount challenge for states is to recognize the multidimensional nature of the child sexual abuse problem and therefore conceive solutions which are multifaceted, focused and integrated.

Jones *et al.* (2014) concur and identify there may be value in adopting an integrated systems approach. An integrated systems approach 'assumes that any desired outcome may be dependent on services provided by multiple organizations' (Teske, 2011: 92). In respect of CSA in the ECA, the model may translate to:

...a synergistic approach to analysing the ways in which the multi-layered facets of abuse interact to reinforce each other (to) generate multi-level activities (conceptual, material, structural) that together might produce effects that are greater than their individual components. For example, a sex offender treatment programme that is developed alongside a public health-oriented education and prevention programme, and in which both address the status of children and gender socialization, may be more effective in combination than as separate interventions (Jones and TrotmanJemmott, 2016: 836).

### ***What is UNICEF doing?***

In recognition of work that needs to be done to address VAC and CSA, and related issues of poverty and inequalities, with the ultimate goal to realise all children's rights in the Eastern Caribbean Area, UNICEF allocated a budget of \$24,100,000 for 2017-2021, subject to available funds. The intention of the funding was to develop and implement 'national legislation to prevent, mitigate and address violence and other childhood abuses and (ensure that) the justice,

education, public health, security and other sectors observe children's rights to this protection' (UNICEF, 2016:7). As well as directly focusing on VAC and CSA, the programme addresses a range of issues that are risk factors for VAC including CSA (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2019).

As a result of the programme funding, UNICEF ECA is committed to supporting countries to implement new prevention and responsive protection strategies with its partners, including governments, as part of a large-scale programme. The programme builds on previous work, for example, the *Breaking the Silence Gender and Community Empowerment Model*, a communitybased intervention that was part-funded by UNICEF and which increased knowledge of CSA in agricultural and fishing villages (Reid et al., 2014). The office has identified 2017-2021 programme goals for its *Eastern Caribbean Multi Country Programme (MCP)* across the

ECA countries and territories; the UNICEF ECA MCP is aligned with UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2018-

2021 goals related to learning, protection and equitable chance in life (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2018c). Its goals focus principally on supporting 'the most vulnerable girls and boys...at risk of violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination'. A key challenge to programme implementation resides in Eastern Caribbean states recognising the multidimensional nature of the issue of child sexual abuse and their realisation of multifaceted, integrated solutions so the UNICEF ECA team will work with country governments and other partners 'to fulfil their commitments to the UNCRC so that every child can grow and develop to reach his or her full potential' (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Eastern Caribbean, 2019). The programme focuses on three 'pillars': (i) lifelong learning, (ii) safety and justice for children' and 'social protection and child rights' (UNICEF Eastern Caribbean, 2019). In respect of:

*(i) Lifelong Learning...*

All children in the EC sub-region will 'have every opportunity to improve their education and developmental outcomes and access equitable and inclusive learning environments across the life cycle, including in emergencies', through:

- Equitable and inclusive early childhood services;

- Promoting positive learning and inclusive environments;
- Strengthening institutional capacity for planning, monitoring and disaster risk reduction.

*(ii) Safety and Justice for Children...*

‘National legislation will be implemented to prevent, mitigate and address violence and other childhood abuses and the justice, education, public health, security and other sectors observe children’s rights to this protection’, by:

- Supporting national justice and systems to develop so that violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect are prevented and treated;
- Fostering political commitment to legislate and budget for strengthening interventions that prevent and respond to violence, abuse, exploitation;
- Building adults’ and children’s capacity to protect children from violence and abuse.

*(iii) Social Inclusion and Child Rights Monitoring...*

Sufficient funding provided by national systems and policies for rights-based quality social policies and social investments, based on dis-aggregated data on children, to address multiple deprivations affecting the most vulnerable children, and build their resilience. This will be achieved by:

- Facilitating exchanges and technical support,
- Supporting national governments to strengthen their capacities to
  - plan, develop and deliver inclusive child focused social protection systems that reduce social vulnerabilities
  - strengthen resilience against shocks and crises affecting food, fuel, finance and environment
  - protect children from poverty and social exclusion

(UNICEF 2016; UNICEF Eastern Caribbean, 2019). UNICEF Eastern Caribbean (2019) also identifies that throughout the 2017-2021 programme, its team will also reduce disaster risk reduction, monitor child rights, strengthen data systems, and promote gender equality.

**With whom is UNICEF working?**

The UNICEF ECA has adopted an integrated systems approach to optimise the effectiveness of its 2017-2021 programme. Its ‘Country Programme Document’ (UNICEF, 2016) sets out its

intention to work with ECA governments, NGOs and civil society organisations across health, education and social development sectors to address, problems in the ECA including CSA. For the *Lifelong Learning* element of its programme, it identifies as its partners the ECA Ministries of Education, Health and Social Development, statistical departments, the OECS Commission and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). To achieve the second element of the programme which is arguably the pillar most directly linked to CSA – *Safety and Justice for Children* – the UNICEF ECA states its intention to build partnerships with the Ministry of Social Development, Offices of Attorneys General, the OECS, the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, statistical departments, regional faith-based organisations and the West Indies Cricket Board. In respect of securing the third element - *Social Inclusion and Child Rights Monitoring* - identified partners are ECA Ministries of Finance, Planning, Social Development, Health and Education, central statistics offices, the OECS, World Bank, the Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre and the International Monetary Fund.

### **What progress has UNICEF ECA made in achieving the Multi-Country Programme Goals?**

At the time of writing, the most recent published progress towards achieving the UNICEF ECA MCP goals was available in the ‘*UNICEF Annual Report 2017 Eastern Caribbean Multi-Country Programme*’ (UNICEF, 2018c). The sections below exemplify selected aspects of progress drawn from that report of work achieved in 2017: the first year of the UNICEF ECA MCP programme. In 2017, the ECA suffered two hurricanes across five of its countries and overseas territories, debts in excess of 75% and low economic growth, all of which increased the vulnerabilities of children and families (UNICEF, 2018c). Consequently, UNICEF adapted strategies, built new partnerships and recruited new staff to support children and families.

#### ***(i) Progress towards Lifelong Learning***

The UNICEF ECA MCP provides for enhanced focus on early childhood development, and the pace of work was increased to allow enhancement of development potential in young children. The UNICEF early child development (ECD) programme has focused on provision of equitable access to high-quality, holistic, inclusive ECD provision and responsive care for boys and girls up to 8 years, in safe, interactive environments. Additionally, UNICEF ECA supported collaboration between stakeholders from health, education and social development sectors to

enhance provision for young children's ECE and holistic development. Partnership between UNICEF and the OECS Commission resulted in the OECS integrated operational framework which affords practical guidance to ECE service providers and enhances provision and coordination of ECA ECE services. It is also notable that 900 stakeholders attended capacity building and training supported by UNICEF with the potential to reach more than 7,000 children aged 0-5 years, including opportunities to learn more about positive child development, protecting children from child sexual abuse and improving their skills in creating safe and stimulating ECD spaces for children in ECA states and territories. In addition, UNICEF ECA has worked in partnership with the Child Care Board in Barbados, the Barbados Red Cross and the Office of the Prime Minister in Trinidad to enhance children's knowledge about violence and disaster risk reduction and violence.

***(ii) Progress towards Safety and Justice for Children***

To prevent VAC, UNICEF ECA has promoted cross-sectoral collaboration between government departments focused on the promotion of positive behaviours, and it has worked in partnership with ministries responsible for child protection and ministries of education in Antigua and St. Lucia to enhance educators' knowledge and skills for preventing and responding to VAC.

UNICEF generated evidence to build new knowledge about the situation of children in the ECA to address information gaps. Five ECA countries developed action plans, five countries completed and shared and situation analyses about children and women and the ECA overseas territories developed national action plans for child safeguarding as well as completing a study on migration and children. Child poverty analysis was conducted across the ECA, and financial studies were completed in Montserrat and the British Virgin Islands. This new knowledge has led to the identification of policy issues so that they can be addressed.

UNICEF ECA conducted an assessment of child protection systems which identified that all OECS countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and some have developed child protection policies, action plans and programmes. The assessment identified problems with implementation and service delivery, as well as significant gaps in coordination of institutional arrangements and lack of interaction between community level structures and

national systems for child protection. UNICEF ECA supported peer-to-peer opportunities for children to act as change agents to address CSA. By working with key partners, UNICEF ECA supported teachers in three ECA states to implement positive behaviour management practices in their classrooms and enhance the capacity of more than 3,000 professionals across five countries to identify, prevent and respond to child sexual abuse.

### ***(iii) Progress towards Social Inclusion and Child Rights Monitoring***

UNICEF has supported ministries responsible for child protection in all ECA countries and linked ministries of education and child protection departments to enable them to work together to implement stronger child protection programmes. Social surveys in ECA overseas territories in 2017 provided data on child sexual abuse, corporal punishment and bullying, which were used to advocate for child protection strategies with stakeholders in Anguilla, BVI and TCI. UNICEF ECA provided or supported participatory interventions that increased knowledge and skills to keep children safe from violence, for example by enabling 50% of early childhood supervisors in St Lucia to teach young children about sexual abuse in culturally and age appropriate ways, and by providing children with opportunities to sensitise their peers about child protection issues.

In the five countries and overseas territories that were affected by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, UNICEF provided for more than 13,000 children to receive psychosocial support, enabled in excess of 12,000 children to access safe community spaces, and messaged two-thirds of children about how to protect themselves from harm during and after the hurricanes. UNICEF also ensured that children had access to safe water and arranged for 1000 plus pre-school children and over 19,000 school-aged children to access ECD and education services.

A collaborative report by UNICEF ECA and the OECS Commission provided disaggregated poverty data on children, informed by datasets from ECA country poverty assessments. These data are important because poverty is a recognised as a risk factor for child abuse (WHO, 2019). The data revealed that child poverty varies considerably across ECA countries, though one in every three children in the ECA is poor, with children in ECA are disproportionately represented among the poor, and child poverty concentrated among children living in households with four children or more. The report provides the basis for new awareness-raising activities in ECA

country states on issues related to child poverty, as well as policy and programme development to address child poverty now and prevent it in the future.

### **What constraints has UNICEF ECA encountered in programme implementation?**

Alongside successful aspects of progress in the '*UNICEF Annual Report 2017 Eastern Caribbean Multi-Country Programme*', UNICEF (2018c) identifies constraints that have hindered efforts so far towards achieving the UNICEF ECA MCP. Firstly, UNICEF (2018c) identifies gaps in the capacity of partners, including limited resources to improve ECE accessibility, poor quality education, weak prioritisation of child protection system reforms, and poor focus on disaster risk reduction in sector plans. Secondly, it notes delays in several countries concerning policy development and programmes that need approval. Delays in finalising surveys and studies are the third constraint to making progress, alongside ongoing inadequacies in data and systematic use of data to provide evidence for decision-making and allocation of resources. The fourth and final constraint UNICEF (2018c) identifies to progress is mobilisation of resources for areas that are unaffected by emergencies.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have considered issues concerning certain protection rights of children in the Eastern Caribbean and ways these may be safeguarded. To set this issue in context, we have explored UNICEF's global work, and we have discussed the prevalence of VAC, particularly CSA, in the context of multiple inequalities in the ECA island states. We have noted that this situation indicates that children's rights specified in UNCRC Articles 19, 34, 37 and 39 (UN 1989) are not respected by all in ECA island states. We have also argued that this situation may affect younger children and infants especially, who, for a variety of reasons, are particularly vulnerable to 'poverty, discrimination, family breakdown and multiple other adversities that violate their rights and undermine their well-being' (UN UNCRC, 2005). In our chapter, we have shown how UNICEF has drawn on evidence to recognise that a multi-level, 'consolidated response from several levels' is needed to tackle the complex issues underpinning VAC and CSA (Howe, 2013; Joseph, 2013:4). We have discussed UNICEF's launch of the UNICEF ECA Multi-Country Programme (UNICEF, 2016), with funding of \$24,100,000 allocated for the period 2017-2021. By launching the ECA MCP, UNICEF has indicated its commitment to



implementing prevention and responsive protection strategies in partnership with governments, non-governmental and civil society organisations across health, education and social development sectors. We have charted ways that the UNICEF ECA has worked with partners since the launch of the MCP to begin to implement prevention and responsive protection strategies with the potential to address VAC, CSA and related issues. We have also highlighted constraints UNICEF has identified that will need to be addressed if the ECA MCP goals are to be achieved by 2021. The implementation of the MCP strategies and the successful achievement of the ECA MCP goals are dependent on UNICEF's partners - including ECA governments – joining with UNICEF to recognise the multidimensional nature of VAC and CSA and working with UNICEF in strong partnership to realise multifaceted, integrated solutions for all children in the ECA.

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